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ABSTRACT

The National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) in the Netherlands originated in 1975 to evaluate and redesign existing curricula and to coordinate programs at various levels. The SLO Humanities department, which includes the subjects of geography, history, and economics, has been engaged in curriculum development in lower vocational and general secondary education programs. This group produces both theoretical publications and practical curriculum guides on such subjects as the family, mass-media, and vandalism. A primary goal of the SLO has been to improve the social and political relevance of education through the introduction of a compulsory course in the last two years of secondary education called Maatschappijleer. A primary basis of this course is that while human thoughts and actions are influenced by society, we can learn to think autonomously and have an impact on the circumstances of our lives through choices. As a result, Maatschappijleer is defined as social and political education designed to train students to learn to live together harmoniously in a democratic and humane manner. The SLO recommends a thematic teaching approach based on introductions to social and political issues. (JHP)

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SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

by

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1. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

by Hans Hooghoff, curriculum specialist in social and political education with the Stichting voor de Leerplanontwikkeling (National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) in the Netherlands.

1.1. Origin

The most junior member of the Dutch educational institutes is the SLO in Enschede, an organization established in 1975.
However, the origin of the SLO can be traced back to the nineteen sixties when developments in the various subjects traditionally taught in schools and in other fields, such as psychology and educational science, necessitated a complete re-thinking of existing curricula. Increasing attention was drawn towards the relationship between the differing schooltypes and the co-ordination of teaching programmes at the various educational levels (longitudinal curriculum planning).
The emphasis placed on the curriculum, shifted from being a mere description of the subject matter, towards an indication of the correlation between the curriculum and the larger framework: the correlation between curriculum, in relation to general and specific objectives, selection of subject matter, didactic procedures and all aspects of school organization.
In the sixties various activities in the field of curriculum development were started by numerous organizations, committees and work-groups. A clear overall plan for all these activities did not exist. There was no organization available to co-ordinate and integrate them into a concrete form. Consequently many unconnected parallel developments were in existence. This situation caused great confusion amongst school teachers.

After ample discussion, involving all kinds of educational organizations and the Ministry, and following several lengthy parliamentary debates, the National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) was born in January 1975.

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1.2. Function and task of SLO

The SLO develops curricula in the form of model publications. Next to that she has coordinating and advisory tasks in this area. SLO is a national institute at the service of the total formal education sector, with exception of the universities. In this way SLO supports current and contributes to design new education. Both schools and the Ministry for Education can request this support. The latter provides SLO's finances. Approximately 275 staff-members work here.
All SLO-publications are produced in close cooperation with schoolpractice. They apply to three levels of educational planning:

- the classroom: experimental teaching-learning packs containing pupil-materials and guidelines for the teacher;
- the school: models (or: examples) of schoolcurricula and pares thereof, which contain agreements on the work of the schoolteam and the individual teacher;

- schooltype: curricula with two functions:
  . an advice to the Minister on the design of a school-type;
  . a source of inspiration in developing a school-curriculum.

After an initial, laborious starting-phase, in which this new insitute was looked upon with a certain suspicion for its possible "state-education" character, SLO earned sympathy through its service-function emerging role of its practice-based curriculumwork and publications. On top of that it was shown that a national coordinator-function did contribute to a more efficient and succesful curriculum development in the broadest sense of the word. Finally it can be observed that SLO increasingly is being invited to participate in European Networks and global organisations in the area of curriculum development. Memorizing its 10th anniversary the SLO, in close cooperation with the American ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) organised in November 1985 in Enschede an international congres on the humanistic and democratic foundations of the core curriculum.

Core curriculum, as one of the final conclusions read, must improve the quality of the teaching, and provide equal education for all pupils.
In recent years this national institute has proved its right of existence by delivering the goods which reflected in the positive stance of the central government.

1.3. The curriculum development project social and political education (= maatschappijleer)

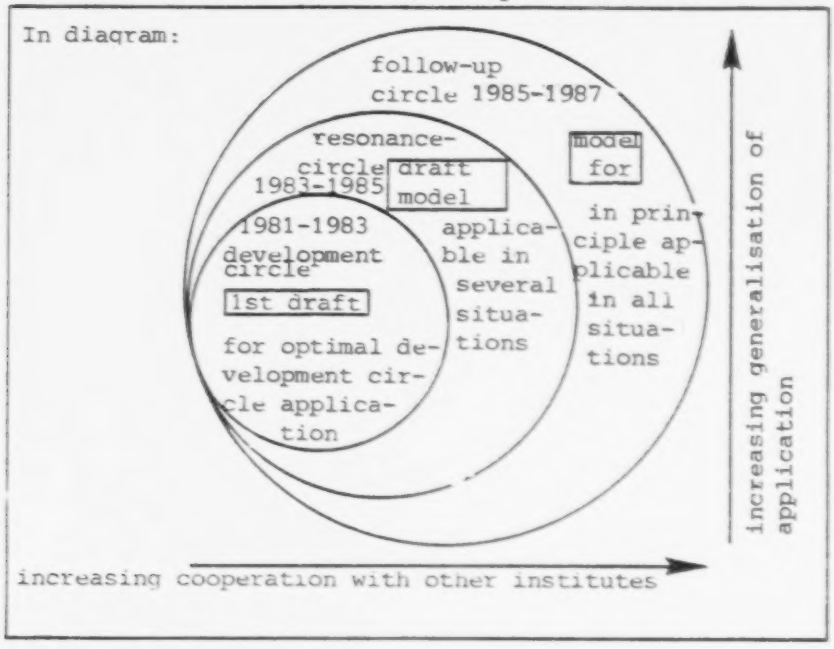
Within the Humanities department (geography, history, economics, "maatschappijleer", health education development education, etc.) of SLO exists the projectgroup "maatschappijleer". This group is engaged in the curriculum development since 1980 for this subject in schools for "lbo" (lower vocational education) and "mavo" (general secondary education) (14-16 year).
The application for this project had been submitted by the Dutch Association of Teachers in Maatschappijleer.
In August 1980 the SLO Board decided to carry out this national project.
In general terms the aims of the project can be defined as:

1. an advice for a common core curriculum maatschappijleer for lbo/mavo;
2. examples of a subjectcurriculum maatschappijleer for lbo/mavo;
3. experimental teaching-learning packs as examples for working out parts of the subjectcurriculum into lessonplans.

A close-to-school strategy

The Association of Teachers in Maatschappijleer in its application stressed the principle of close cooperation with teachers maatschappijleer in the execution of the national project. This desire coincided with SLO-principles.
In concerted action between teachers and projectgroup a development strategy was determined, within which teachers were to play a decisive role. The projectstrategy has three phases and with every phase a greater circle of teachers is being involved.
1. The development-phase with development circle.
2. The resonancephase with resonance circle.
3. The follow-up phase with follow-up circle.

These phases start one after the other with intervals of two and one year. At the beginning of the development-phase the emphasis is with developmentwork at classroom level with socalled development teachers. These teachers together with projectgroup form the development circle. The development circle produces the first project products in the form of "first drafts". These "first drafts" are handed on to the resonance-circle, which after two years is being formed around the development circle.
The development teachers remain part of the resonance circle and the "first drafts" are being tested for usefulnes and adjusted till "draft models". These "draft models" will be tested by the follow-up circle for their transferability and model (= example) character.



In the period '81-'85 a series of publications have been produced under the heading social and political education. On the one hand they are of a theoretical nature (like: View on "maatschappijleer" and On learning and teaching), on the other hand they are very practical guidelines of for instance series of lessons on a particular theme (like: the family, mass-media, vandalism, Handbook for the planning of "maatschappijleer"education).
In August 1985 the follow-up circle started. Forty schools participated this time, among whom were also teachers who had been involved in earlier circles. This final phase, accompanied by an external evaluation test, does not concentrate solely on the usefulness and effects of curricula developed earlier. The definition and description of a balanced and coherent basic programme is at least as important, the so-called communal education offered to pupils of 14 to 16. By the end of 1987, the project team must submit a final report, in which costs and benefits are analysed of the curriculum strategy pursued, as well as the value and significance of the publications at various curriculum levels.

2. A VIEW OF AIMS AND CONTENT OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION.

2.1. Developments since 1945

With the introduction of the Secondary Education Act (1968) the subject maatschappijleer appeared on the time-table. Research has been done as to how a new subject managed to be timetabled in secondary education. Two different but parallel tendencies are usually distinguished, the one affecting the other, both being of great influence:

a. the gigantic developments of technology and science, causing deep changes in society and contributing to the growing complexity of it;
b. a strong movement for renewal, as reaction to the experience of World War II, having major impact on social and political thinking. A strive for democratization and humanisation of society was a result of this.

Various circles in society expressed wishes for an education that would be more responsive to changes in society.
Existing education was characterized as too intellectualistic, too individualistic and a far cry from reality. Education was in a need for more social and political relevance in order to properly fulfill its task in preparing young people for life in a fast changing and highly complicated society. The need for political education within the schoolsystem was closely related to this. To improve social and political relevance of education would contribute to an education that would sustain a society worth to live in.

In 1968 maatschappijleer appears on the timetable as a separate subject for all schools in secondary education. The Dutch school system was confronted with the complex problem of giving shape and content to a social subject, for which no definition existed and which had to occupy a position next to geography, history and economics. Maatschappijleer then becomes a compulsory subject in the last two years of secondary education but without final exams. The subject's task was in one way or other to prepare pupils for their social and political life. By definition the subject would offer a socially and politically relevant education.
Questions like principles, aims and subjectmatter have been objects of fierce discussions and diverging opinions for years.

Consensus on aims and content of "maatschappijleer"

Meanwhile a number of developments took place both in education practice and at the level of the authorities which brought about a certain consensus on nature and function of the subject.
This consensus is to be found in the "View of Maatschappijleer", published in December 1981 by the SLO-project-group maatschappijleer. By the end of 1983 this View had been legitimized by Colleges of Education, Universities, Teachers' Unions and interested individuals.
Before getting to the main points of this View we need to briefly reflect on the projectgroup's view on man, society and education.

2.2. *A view on individual and society*

Fundamental to the determination of aims and content of maatschappijleerteaching is our idea that man's thinking and acting is greatly influenced by society, but yet that he can, for an essential part, act autonomously and have impact on the circumstances of his life. Man can make choices for himself. Although such choices are influenced by society they are not exclusively determined by it. This opportunity to make choices independently can be both respected and stimulated, in spite of the fact that the way man perceives society is greatly influenced by his education within that society. Still we can state that man will perceive society through individual perceptions, experiences and interpretations.
People do not live in or with abstract structures, they live in real situations. People don't live in "society", they live in houses, with relatives, friends, in groups, alone, in a neighbourhood. They work with colleagues in a storehouse or a school. In this type of real everyday situations people act and make choices.
The circumstances in which these choices are made are socially and politically determined, e.g. these circumstances are determined by social and political forces. Our society has rules and institutions of its own. The whole of this societal fabric has its influence onto our small-scale interhuman relations. But yet every perception of the social reality has again an independent, very personal aspect.
Man is not just a responsive being, determined by a societal system and his instincts. Although social and political determination imply certain restrictions to our thinking and acting, this does not result in being deprived of autonomous, free choices.
From history we can learn that social and political institutions and structures can be changed in time by decisions taken by men at variance with current values and standards.
Between the extremes of social-political determination and freedom of choice there are possibilities for autonomous and free choices. This is an important principle for the organization of maatschappijleerteaching.
At the same time we prevent doom-thinking and offer pupils a perspective on opportunities in their social life.

2.3. Task and function of education

The schoolsystem is not an institution on its own within our society. It is inextricably tied to the economic situation, political circumstances and the social structure of society.
Through education the individual gets to know and accept existing social-economic and political situations. This happens through the family, the peergroup etcetera, through teaching it is deliberately being organized by professionals. Through education there is an adaptation to the current system of social rules and agreements. This is being planned in the formal curriculum and happens accidentally through the hidden curriculum.
To be aware of these facts is quite important for the organization of maatschappijleerteaching, since the socialisation function of education in a concentrated form is to be found in this subject.
This is not all that happens with the individual in the school. Man is not only at the mercy of social-political forces. Young people play an active role in the development of their personal identity. They make choices of their own and by doing so decide at least partially the development of their identity. Education can act as a stimulus, it can also work as a brake. In our opinion the school ought to stimulate the development of an individual identity.
Maatschappijleerteaching can contribute in helping young people to maintain their position in society without losing their individual identity. We try to avoid a behaviour of overadaptation or total-dissension and to encourage a behaviour of not only being a product but also a producer of the milieu.

2.4. Maatschappijleer: social and political education

Following our view of individual and society and looking at the functions of education in school we define maatschappijleer as social and political education, aimed at living together critically in a democratic and humane way.

Social education

Social education implies that pupils develop such knowledge, skills and attitudes as to enable them occupying a relatively independent position in social life. Here one can think of knowledge of and insight in social institutions and processes, of skills like discussion, cooperation, empathy, listening, taking a stand and developing attitudes like solidarity, tolerance, self-esteem, service, self-management and respect.

Political education

Political education aims at the democratisation of all sectors of society. Political education attempts to make pupils aware of their personal and collective position and to develop skills for exerting influence. The development of knowledge, skills and attitudes is being stressed in order to have individuals acquire insight in their interests and those of others aimed at defending and promoting those.

Social and political education

From the above it will be clear that social and political education are closely interlinked. A sharp distinction is hard to make. It depends on whether one stresses the social or the political aspects of society. The emphasis of this type of education is on the development of a critical attitude, enabling pupils to know and discern social and political problems, processes and structures. Social and political education aims at making the self-evidence of our society less self-evident. It stimulates the reflection on the foundations of societal questions at large- and small-scale, without offering instant solutions. Social and political education stimulates the taking of a personal stand and an involved parttaking in society, where necessary aimed at a change of mentality and organisational structures.

In current maatschappijleerteaching only a beginning of social and political education is to be expected.
A first limited social-political orientation; a first confrontation with social-politically determined attitudes, opinions and behaviour and a first reconnaissance of opportunities of choice.
In this awareness we opt for the treatment of controversial problems, that evidently are of social-political interest.
Maatschappijleerteaching is not in first instance aiming at transfer of knowledge and reproduction of knowledge (imitation). It first of all aims at discerning and analysing social-political questions and at reflecting on personal choices based on knowledge of processes and phenomena (identification).

Objectives

The subject social and political education aims to develop knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes in pupils, enabling them

1. to gain a clearer view of their own social world of experience, and from there to judge broader social relations by gathering, processing and applying information concerning:
   - 1.1. political and social problems in present-day society, particularly the views of various social groups on these problems, and the interests and power structures behind them;
   - 1.2. values, standards, aims and expectations of various groups in society and their influence on people's actions, both individually and as groups;
   - 1.3. the possibility of changing society, including the question as to the possibilities of solving social and political problems;
   - 1.4. present-day society, seen in the perspective of historical development and as compared to other societies.
2. to relate political and social problems to fundamental problems inherent in living together and the various views on this.
3. to choose from various points of view on problems in society, and

4. to gain insight into the consequences of their own social and political actions and those of others.

In summary, and more orientated to teaching-practice:

"Maatschappijleer" aims at:
to have pupils acquire a critical and creative way of dealing with social and political phenomena and problems based on relevant and valid information.

dealing with

Explanation:
This implies that pupils:
- learn to view their experiences, questions and opinions related to the characteristic social and political context;
- to acquire insight in their own values and norms, views and interests, comparable with those of other people and groups in a common context;
- to acquire insight in the changeability, in the actual instability and in the unruleness of the social and political phenomena and in the solvability of problems;
- to acquire skills that will enable them to collect information and apply it in such a way as to bring about change or to conserve as they seem necessary.

It is desirable that pupils can apply what they have learned, in new situations, than they have to be offered a variety of assignments which they can deal with autonomously to start with.
Once an objective or skill is more complex and demands greater creativeness and inventiveness then methodoligical forms have to be chosen which will be a stronger challenge to pupils' personal qualities, and methods that allow for greater differentiation.

in a critical and creative way

This implies, that we wish to stimulate pupils to view social and political phenomena and problems not as self-evident. The everyday reality is too often accepted as self-evident. This has a certain risk of fatalism, a risk of social and political desinterest.
Maatschappijleer attempts to make the self-evident less evident, so as to have pupils distinguish between facts, opinions, and background and have them trace the determination by interests of those.
The aims are:
- to have pupils deal with social and political problems in a creative and critical way as to reach a personal point of view that can be accounted for;

- to develop a social and political engagement based on a well-founded ability of political judgement.

A critical approach contains both reflection and action. A non-active human becomes a critical looker-on restricted to verbalism. Action without reflection can turn into chaos and destruction.

A creative approach is to be distinguished from a rigid approach, since the first one tries to view problems from various perspectives before opening for a particular viewpoint. Before chosing one particular solution, various solutions have been reviewed.

relevant and well-founded information

1. The information (subjectmatter) should have sufficient usefulness in "maatschappijleer". In other words: the information must provide a substantial contribution in achieving the forementioned aims and should fit into the framework of content.

2. The information (subjectmatter) should be valid. In other words: the information must be answered for scientifically. The social sciences have a role to play in guarding the validity of the information.

3. The information (subjectmatter) should be worthwhile for the pupils. The information has got to link in with the pupils' life and experiences, it should attract their interest.

The proces of developing an opinion could ideally speaking be as follows.
An originally unstructured opinion about a social issue is turned into a series of questions (problem propositions). Guided by these questions sources (among them social-scientific ones) are consulted. Facts and opinions need as much as possible to be distinguished.

At the end of the information-process a tentative opinion has to be assessed against generalised opinions (value-orientations) and tested on logic and consistency.
Finally a personal and structured opinion can be formed.

2.5 *An existence-oriented approach*

An important question now remains:
how to enlarge, deepen and broaden pupils' understanding of society and their own position within, as to get to the viewed goal as close as possible?

A variety of approaches is possible:

1. In the time available we transfer as much knowledge as possible, which has been deduced from sciences and tuned to the level of the pupils (sciences central).
2. To transfer knowledge and develop skills based on a clear perception of society (society central).
3. Only knowledge is transferred and skills developed that have the interest of the pupils and is wanted by them (pupil central).

4. To transfer such knowledge and develop such skills as are of practical importance for the present and future social-political position of the pupils. Scientific knowledge and methods will only be applied if their usefulness in solving social and policital problems is evident.
In selecting subjectmatter pupils' interest and ability are taken in account strongly.

From the above it will be clear that to the last option — the existence-oriented approach of maatschappijleer-teaching — preference is given. This approach combines the adventages of the three others where as emphasis is given to the present and future life of our pupils. Through an existence-oriented approach we want to equip and prepare pupils for dealing with social and political phenomena and problems they may encounter in their (future) life.
This implies that aims and content of our maatschappij-leerteaching has been selected and elaborated in correspondance with their life and experiences. The concrete subjectmatter has to be selected in perspective of the pupils' present and future life.
The subjectmatter has to be presented in a for pupils recognizable and relevant context: in themes.
In daily practice pupils ought to be able to apply what they learn In this way we encourage their social and policital involvement and their personal identity.
This is being supported by offering a variety of ways of learning, as to suit both the more practical and the more academic pupils.
Learning through identification is being encouraged, learning through imitation is being limited.
Maatschappijleerteaching will allow and encourage pupils' initiatives and where possible pay attention to current affairs. Thus the critical attitude and creativity are stimulated, whereas the coherence and complexity of social-political issues are clarified and stressed.

2.C Themeareas as framework for subjectcontent

The knowledge, to be transferred by the subject maatschappijleer, is in our concept of teaching, not to be deduced from one or more scientific disciplines. The scientific knowledge, founded on the subject's primary sciences (politicology, sociology, cultural anthropology) serves to support and legitimize the aims we wish to achieve.
The theme-areas have not been selected at random but after ample comparison of methods and curricula from in- and outside the country.
The major selection-criteria are: the aims, learning and development psychology, youthsociology and socialisation-theories.
Here we are concerned with a concrete arrangement of daily reality for the teaching-situation. The purpose of these theme-areas is to achieve greater uniformity for teaching maatschappijleer in the Netherlands.
A theme-area is a framework for mapping out social and political problems and phenomena (linked to daily life experience) which can be recognized and viewed in their interlinking relations.
They involve areas of human life, in which man in relation to others is engaged in activities based on values and standards, supported by knowledge and skills in order to satisfy social and political needs.
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The following theme-areas can be regarded as a concrete ordening of the day-to-day reality of teaching situations and offer both school and teacher sufficient room to make their own selections.

1. Education.
   Family, relationships, mass-media, youth.
2. Home, house and environment.
   Environment, housing and politics.
3. Work and leisure.
   Unemployment, social benefits, recreation.
4. Technology and society.
   Technology and ethics, the information society, bio-technology.
5. State and society.
   Parliamentary democracy, political processes, government and citizen, crime and criminal law.
6. International relations.
   The development issue, armament/disarmament, human rights, European cooperation.

2.7. *A thematic approach*

The existence-oriented character of the subject (the limited periods available on the time-table) and arguments taken from the psychology of learning and developmental psychology clearly show that the formation of concepts in this area need to be pursued through concrete, recognizable phenomena found in contemporary society. Phenomena that are being presented in their wider context. It is for this reason that "maatschappijleer" opts for a thematic approach.

A theme is a recognizable form for pupils within which social and political problems are put forward in a context relevant and worthwhile for them.

The above definition brings us to the following features of a theme:

- a theme links up with the life and living situation of the pupils; it contains (a) recognizable problem(s);
- a theme puts the problems forward in a meaningful context, so as to present the problems in a concrete form which is digestible and to clarify the inter-relationship of the problems/phenomena concerned;
- a theme makes central a controversial problem area that in the eyes of the teacher and pupils is important and relevant and which leaves room for a diversity of problem propositions;
- a theme offers the concrete framework for the acquisition of a number of social concepts regarded as relevant;
- a theme offers the opportunity for the treatment of current affairs;
- a theme provides an overview of the broad social fabric of which the proposed problems are part and parcel.

2.8. *Social and political problems*

Social and political issues are central to maatschappijleer. Here we mean issues (like the application of nuclear energy) which are being viewed as problems by people in their daily life. A social problem then is a critical position in and/or of society. Many individuals and organizations are involved with such problems: politicians, action groups, massmedia, those immediately affected, etcetera.

Social problems are not always political problems at the same time: what is viewed by those immediately affected, or what is seen by massmedia or trade-unions as a social problem, does not necessarily appear as such in the political process.

Opinions differ as to the solution on ground of diverging values and standards. These values and standards direct thinking and acting in the present and future society. Reflecting in the future has implications for todays actions, for instance in taking political decisions. Values and standards play an important role in judging social and political issues, so we speak of a normative orientation concerning these issues.

In approaching social problems emphasis is put on the solution of the problem: acting. The framework in which the problem is being approached is often of an instant and practicable and seldom of a scientific nature.

Scientific information and methods will only be applied if in practice they can contribute to the solution of social and political problems. If the sciences are applied it will be in a multidisciplinary way.

The solution of social problems is the result of a process of selection, which is essentially of a political nature and related to diverging interests and value-orientations. Such orientations are to be found in religious and ideological-political views, which have a signboardfunction for acting.

2.9. *Future*

In our society a pluriformity of views of man and society exist.

Maatschappijleer, as social and political education, attempts to provide insight in the social and political problems of society. Here it appears essential to get to know and to analyse the broad spectrum of current views that exist. In doing so both the system-confirming as the system-critical views will be looked upon.

Not just the downtrodder, well-known and earlier formulated answers, but above all the non-evident, alternative answers to the social problems are important to the development of an independent and critical attitude of the pupil in a pluralistic and democratic society.

Since in The Netherlands a legitimation of aims and content of social and political education exists and since the Minister of Education has ordered the formulation of an examination-programme for all types of schools, it appears high time to steps forward a succesful implementation and dissemination.

SLO's emphasis in curriculum development will be on the turning of views into school-practice and to test such views to their feasibility and usefulness.

In the years ahead the projectgroup Maatschappijleer, in conjunction with colleges of education, plans to invest most of its energy in the organisation of conferences and workshops and the development of publishing handbooks and modelpacks. Important issues no doubt are the revision of existing material and the use of the micro-computer. The central goal, however, is a permanent place and an identity of its own of social and political education in Dutch education. In this context it is wise policy to learn from successes and failures abroad.

In recent years members of the project group participated in several international congresses, seminars, workshops and a good number of study-visits were undertaken (USA: NCSS, SSEC; UK: ATSSm Schools Council, Universities and Colleges; Germany: Zentrum für Politische Bildung, Universities; France: CNRP; etc.).
All these activities have involved the collection of information about curriculum development (strategy, legitimation, implementation).
On the other hand SLO has received many overseas guests who were interested in the curricular developments in the Netherlands. This has resulted in requests for the writing of articles (UK, USA, Germany) and in organising workshops. With all these institutions and organizations contacts are kept alive in the form of an ongoing exchange of information for instance through newsletters. The project group "maatschappijleer" is wanting to intensify links and exchanges at a European level. SLO favours a more structured form of cooperation. In this framework the emerging of a European Netwerk for Development Education is most welcome. The project group already has an advisory role vis-à-vis this Network.
It is however, in order to optimalise usefulness and accessibility of existing knowledge and expertise in the European countries, necessary to establish an international coordinating bodym which can operate as an adequate service-center to curriculum activities at various levels.
In this way the quality of political and social education can be enhanced meaningfully.
The initiating preparatory phase of such an international body will require an exchange of informative products in the framework of multi-country projects.
Such initiatives can count on SLO-support.

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